ADULT LEARNERS, WRITING GROUPS AND REVISIONS

by

Mary Madden

B.S., Indiana University, 1972

PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

July 2002

ABSTRACT

Five Adult Basic Education students took part in a study to determine whether peer feedback in writing groups encourages revision and improves audience awareness. The study was a pretest—posttest control group design. One group was designated to be the independent writers' group and the second became a peer feedback group. Participants were given two writing assignments, then they were asked to revise them using a checklist, either independently or within their peer group. The writings were evaluated on a primary trait scale designed to accommodate the students' current abilities. Because of the small sample size and the brief duration of the study, data analysis was adversely affected; however, students were interviewed at the end of the study and did generally offer positive comments about their experience in a writing group.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract		ii
Table of Contents		iii
List of Tables		v
List of Figures		vi
Chapter One	Introduction	1
	The Problem	1
	Why Don't Students Revise?	1
	The Purpose of the Study	3
	Design	3
	Theoretical Foundations	4
	Writing Revision	5
	Audience Awareness	7
	Writing Groups—Advantages	8
	Writing Groups—Disadvantages	15
	Summary	16
Chapter Two	Methodology	19
	Participants	19
	Instruments	19
	Procedure	20
Chapter Three	Results	26
	Data Collected	26
	Participant Interviews	29
Chapter Four	Discussion	32
	Sample Size	32
	The Nature of the Task	33
	Incorporating Peers' Comments	33
	Objectivity and Writing Styles	33
	Length of the Study	34
	Use of Checklists	34
	The Value of Writing Groups	35
	Implications for Instruction	36
	Future Considerations	37
	Conclusion	38

Bibliography		39
Appendix 1	Writing Checklist	42
Appendix 2	Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale	43
Appendix 3	Student Feedback Questionnaire	44
Appendix 4	Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent Form	46
Appendix 5	Letter of Request to Dean	49
Appendix 6	Letter of Approval from Dean	50
Appendix 7	UNBC Research Ethics Board Letter of Approval	51
Appendix 8	UCC Research Ethics Board Letter of Approval	52

List of Tables

Table 1	Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale Pretest Scores	26
Table 2	Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale Practice Scores	27
Table 3	Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale Posttest Scores	27
Table 4	t-Test: Two Sample Assuming Equal Variances	29

List of Figures

Figure 1 Average Scores for Writing Groups and Independent Writers 28

Chapter 1

The Problem

While the act of writing is generally a struggle for most students, writers in Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes (upgrading to the grade 12 level) often have an especially difficult time revising their compositions. Their typically poor reading and writing skills and their frequently negative prior experiences with school combine to make revision an intimidating and daunting task. In addition, because of their low reading skills, they often have not been exposed to many good examples of finished or polished writing. In my ABE classes we discuss the importance of revising, what to look for, and how to go about making changes, but students still tend to make few, if any, revisions to their writing. Although I encourage them to examine their writing from the point of view of a reader, or their audience, to see if it could be made more clear and understandable, the changes students make tend to be superficial and sparse. When I provide concrete suggestions for improvement, students generally make the indicated changes mechanically, with little thought or question as to why those recommendations were made.

Why Don't Students Revise?

Students may resist making revisions for a variety of reasons. One of the problems is that writers with little experience are often unsure of just what aspects of writing are most important. For example, White (1990) points out that adult writers often equate good writing with correct spelling. Adult Basic Education students frequently think that if they have checked the spelling in their rough draft, they are finished revising. In addition, students sometimes indicate that revising their writing is simply too

complicated, so they don't even try. Students may not know how to break down the task of revision into manageable sections which can then be addressed individually. The literature suggests, however, that the problem of students not revising may be more complicated than simply not knowing what is important and how to approach the process (Dawe, Watson & Harrison, 1984; see also Bryan, 1996; Gere, 1990). Students may come to understand the important aspects of writing yet still be unable to look at their own writing and ascertain whether it is clear, organized, and understandable to their audience. Experienced writers, on the other hand, seem to have the ability to assume the role of reader and look at their writing from the point of view of the audience (Dawe et al., 1984). Another possible explanation as to why ABE students don't revise may be that writers, when familiar with a subject, have a natural tendency to infer information that is not actually stated. For example, I may write "milk" on my grocery list. From that, I know what brand of milk, what percent of fat, what size, and how many containers I want to buy. Most of the time, these mental shortcuts are convenient and beneficial; however, when audience understanding is necessary, writers need to be aware that they may be unconsciously, filling in gaps. They may *think* they have written something that is not actually there. In order for the audience to be able to comprehend any text, some basic elements are necessary: a clear theme or topic, an appropriate amount and level of detail, and a logical order or progression of ideas (Armbruster, 1984). Unfortunately, students often lack the ability to examine their own writing and determine whether they are meeting those needs.

Purpose of the Study

Adult Basic Education students have difficulty revising their writings because, at least in part, they are unable to see their writing from an outside perspective. The issue to be studied then, is how best to create that sense of audience awareness in a writer—the ability to get outside one's self and see one's writing from another person's point of view. While teachers can, to some degree, help students become aware of their audience when they write, many studies (Bruffee, 1985; Gere, 1985; Nystrand & Brandt, 1989) conducted with children and first-year university students as participants have demonstrated that peer group feedback, or discussion in writing groups, has a more positive influence on student writings than comments or suggestions from teachers. Few studies, however, have examined the effect of peer groups on the writings of individuals in ABE classes. The purpose of this study is to determine whether, at the ABE level, discussion in writing groups works better than working independently to increase the writer's awareness of audience.

Design

In an effort to study the effect of writing groups on audience awareness, I divided my ABE English class into two groups with similar writing scores. All students were given the same writing assignments and received a checklist (Appendix 1) which served as a revision guide (Dawe et al.,1984; Shurbutt, 1987; Spandel & Stiggins, 1990). One group worked independently to revise their writings based upon the criteria in the checklist. The second group took turns sharing and discussing their writings with the other members. The peer group was to discuss the writings using the checklist as the framework for their comments. All students then revised their compositions, either based

on the work they did independently or as a result of their peer group discussions. Writings were evaluated on the Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale (Appendix 2), a researcher-prepared modification of various writing assessment tools (Dawe et al., 1984; Gomez, Parker, Alecio, & Gomez, 1996; Gregg, Sigalas, Hoy, Wienbaker, & McKinley, 1996).

Theoretical Foundations

Before examining whether peer discussion can have a positive effect on the development of audience awareness in ABE writers, it is important to establish the connection between discussion and writing. In order to do so, we need to examine the function of language itself in the development of human thought. Vygotsky (1986, cited in Hicks, 1996) argued that language is the means through which knowledge is constructed. Despite years of study and research, *how* discourse actually mediates learning is still not fully understood. Hicks, however, suggests that

> theorists working within a sociocognitive framework assume that learning is situational, both context and culture specific, and that it is mediated by language....The melding of sociocognitive and sociocultural perspectives reconfigures learning and education as inherently messy phenomena—complex, though not indescribable; something to be *understood* rather than explained causally through scientific inquiry. (pp. 3-4)

Vygotsky theorized that communication occurs between people and is then internalized by the individual, thus serving as a catalyst for the re-organization of the person's thinking. McCarthy and Raphael (1992) summarize Vygotsky's thoughts by stating that "the role of language and dialogue is critical since it is through speech and social

interaction that the learner acquires new abilities" (p. 17). Bruner (1996) enlarges on the idea of the critical importance of language and discourse by suggesting:

> We do not learn a way of life and ways of deploying mind unassisted, unscaffolded, naked before the world. And it is not just sheer language acquisition that makes this so. Rather, it is the give and take of talk that makes collaboration possible....And it is through this dialogic, discursive process that we come to know the Other and his points of view, his stories. We learn an enormous amount not only about the world but about ourselves by discourse with Others. (p. 93)

Language then, is a critical precursor and catalyst for cognitive development and a "cultural and cognitive mediator of learning" (Hicks, 1996, p. 2). Since discourse can be either oral or written, the two are conjoined in the process of learning (Vacca & Linek 1992). The act of talking naturally stimulates thought; old information combines with new to produce revisions of previous understandings. Similarly, the act of writing also has the ability to enhance learning. The process of writing and reflecting on paper enables the formation of a relationship between the individual and what is being learned (Vacca & Linek, 1992). Writing, therefore, can function to clarify ideas and solidify new knowledge and understanding.

Writing Revision

While the writing process can be, and often is, recursive, it tends to follow a basic pattern: choosing a topic, generating ideas, writing a rough draft, revising, editing, and writing the final draft. In the classroom, teachers often break the process down into these or similar steps in an effort to make writing more approachable for students. According to

Bryan (1996), "one key to improving students' writing was for them to consider what was interesting and clear about other students' writing. I realized that in breaking down the steps in learning a skill, it is helpful for students to begin with recognition of the skill before applying it" (p. 189). Of those writing steps, Dawe et al. (1984) speculate that "revision may be the most critical component of the writing process" (p. 47). For ABE students, it can also be the most difficult aspect of writing. For a variety of reasons, students are often reluctant or unable to revise their own drafts. They may simply be unaware of the weaknesses in their writing. Sometimes, the task of attending to the many concurrent aspects of writing such as spelling, grammar, organization, development, etc., can feel overwhelming. Some students therefore, may not even attempt the necessary revisions (Dawe et al.,1984). The authors contend that "experienced and inexperienced writers differ significantly in their reading and revising strategies. Inexperienced writers often fail to revise their work. They also have difficulty rereading their writing from the perspective of a critical reader" (p. 48). Final drafts often end up looking like neatly written forms of their first draft. On the other hand, "experienced writers cope with the demand of the writing process by breaking the task up into manageable parts" (Dawe et al., 1984, p. 48). A common comment in the literature about novice writers is that "when asked to revise, inexperienced writers typically make only low-level mechanical and word-level changes" (Matsuhashi & Gordon, 1985, p. 227). So why, at the ABE level, is this such a common occurrence? Dawe et al. argue, "Many students are simply unable to see the need to improve the expression of the ideas. They may not even be aware of the options" (p. 48). While there are specific ways to make students more aware of their options, the problem may be much deeper than students simply not knowing what to do.

The inability to assume the perspective of the audience may lie at the heart of the revision issue.

Audience Awareness

From the standpoint of the audience, coherence (or the relationship of ideas) in writing is probably the most important element for understanding a text, and the organization or structure of that text is how coherence is achieved (Armbruster, 1984). Organization can be broken down into four basic components: an understandable structure with a beginning, middle, and end; a logical order or sequence to the presentation of ideas; an appropriate amount of information; and clearly presented thoughts and ideas. When these basic audience needs are ignored by a writer, the ability to understand the text is greatly impaired.

For this reason, audience awareness is generally considered to be central to good writing (Dawe et al., 1984; Gregg et al., 1996). Many researchers (Dawe et al., 1984; Gere, 1990; Matsuhashi & Gordon, 1985) believe that the ability to step outside one's self and view one's own writing from an alternate perspective is common to skilled writers and is lacking in inexperienced writers. Matsuhashi and Gordon (1985) suggest that the reason students have difficulty revising arises from the Piagetian notion of egocentrism, or the inability to perceive another's perspective. They maintain that nonrevisers are more egocentric and therefore have more difficulty viewing their writing with detachment. Spandel and Stiggins (1990) support that notion when they propose that "the toughest thing for student writers to acquire and the single thing most needed by a writer in revising his or her own work ....[is] perspective" (p. 155). ABE students need to be able to look at their writing from the perspective of their audience in order to

ascertain whether their writing is clear and understandable. Elsasser and John-Steiner (1980, cited in the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training, [hereafter The Ministry] 1987) explain the issue of revision in a similar way:

> An essential problem for many students is their inability to 'decontextualize' thought—that is, to change language from an intrapersonal [within the person] to an interpersonal [between persons] process. Since the writer is unaware that he or she is mentally filling in the gaps, the end result is writing that is sketchy, general, apparently unorganized, and largely meaningless to a reader who approaches it from outside the writer's context. (p. 256)

The Ministry (1987) points out that writing is a complicated process, requiring the writer to continually switch roles from writer to reader, then back to writer in order to see what the audience sees, then address any problems that may have come to the writer's attention. The Ministry suggests that one of the best ways to enhance the ability to see from an external perspective is for students to *talk* about what they are writing.

Writing Groups—Advantages

The act of writing is a complicated and non-linear process; however, it can be broken down into smaller units and clarified through discussion. Vacca and Linek (1992) contend that to be most effective, writing *should* be reinforced by talking and listening. Gregg et al. (1996) stress that there are three essential components of effective writing: sense of self, sense of audience, and linguistic competence. Through discussion, students can come to understand the importance of each and how they interact to stimulate new thinking and refine unclear ideas. Vacca and Linek point out that "talking and writing enable students who are not naturally reflective to become involved in the same thinking

processes better students use routinely" (p. 150). For ABE students, discussion groups can therefore help them to get into the habit of critically examining their writing by listening to feedback from peers. Bruffee (1985) explains that writing is both a social and collaborative act, and he argues that while a certain level of discourse can occur between teacher and student, peer discourse is actually more effective. He maintains that "productive conversation for all of us is most likely to occur with people we regard as equals, members of our own community" (p. 4).

Over many years of study, peer groups have been shown to provide many positive effects upon students' writing. Sainsbury (1992) contends that small and large group discussions contribute to a sense of competence and confidence in students. He argues that students need time to talk, explore, and negotiate with each other. Gere (1985) encapsulates the findings of numerous studies by outlining four advantages of peer writing groups: (a) students become more aware of their audience, (b) teachers are no longer seen as the sole authority, (c) students are exposed to various writing styles, and (d) they develop a sense of community. As a result of his own research, Hillocks (1992) argues that "student-led small-group discussions...can have a powerful impact on individual writing when the students work together in those discussions to solve problems parallel to those they will confront in the individual writing" (p. 63). He maintains that discussions in such groups can be up to four times more effective than feedback received from teachers. Nystrand and Brandt (1989) point out other benefits of writing groups:

> For years we have conducted research... examining the effectiveness of peer conferencing in college freshman writing instruction....[and] it is clear that students who write for each other not only learn to write better, but also that they

learn to write differently than students whose sole audience is the instructor. (p.209)

Several studies indicate an improved attitude about writing and revision as a result of the use of writing groups. In one study, Nystrand (1986) noted that students who shared their writing in peer groups displayed a more positive attitude toward writing, and they came to view writing as an opportunity to communicate, rather than as something to be evaluated. Bouton and Tutty (1975) studied two high school English classes and compared their performance on writing assignments which were evaluated either by the teacher or by their peers. They found that the writings of the peer-evaluated group generally showed greater improvement. Bouton and Tutty commented that "although [peers'] corrections may not be as professional as the teacher's they will be much more thorough, and in most cases, much more constructive" (p. 67). The authors' interpretation was that the negative comments of peers were less threatening and therefore more acceptable than teachers' comments.

Gere (1990) puts forward a similar sentiment expressed by students about the revision process by saying that "a student who hears her peers say that they do not understand is much more likely to want to revise her work than the student who has been admonished by the teacher to polish a draft" (p. 123). Weeks and White (1982) conducted a study comparing the effect of peer feedback to teacher feedback on written composition with fourth and sixth grade students. They noted a trend toward improvement in the peer feedback groups' writings, and they also noticed an improvement in attitude toward writing and self-confidence in the peer feedback groups. They commented that "students were more eager and more excited about writing for their peers. They expressed a desire

to write and edit" (p. 18). Weeks and White also indicated that the students in groups wrote more and "became better judges of the quality of writing" (p. 18). The researchers attributed the lack of significant results to small sample sizes and the short duration of the study.

A common observation made by students and researchers notes the difference between the nature of teacher and student feedback. Teachers tend to make general comments about the quality of the writing, whereas peers frequently offer concrete suggestions as to word choice, whether there are too many or not enough details, and whether the writer's point is clear and understandable. They also tend to focus on specific details of the text and how the writer might say certain things differently. While students rarely employ the technical language used by teachers in editing, they will usually recognize that something isn't quite right and eventually get their point across. Peers will often ask what the writer plans to do next, thereby prompting the writer to focus on the sequence of steps in the revision process. Gere (1990) emphasizes that through the discussion of each others' writings, students learn the metalanguage of writing and they are encouraged to pay attention to the process of writing itself.

The timing of the discussion also aids in the development of audience awareness. When writing groups meet after the rough draft stage, students can get early feedback about their ideas. According to Gere (1990), "The immediacy of writing groups...fosters students' audience awareness. They learn that what is clear to them is not necessarily clear to an audience, and as a result, they learn to take audience needs into account as they write" (p. 123). In three separate studies, Nystrand and Brandt (1989) looked at the role of peer groups in the revision process, and they concluded that "revisions are text

hypotheses of sorts and...learning results when writers are able to test their efforts in the crucible of reader response...writers are never far removed from a functional writer-reader context" (p. 226). Rather than the student having to wait for the finished product to be evaluated at some later date by the teacher, writing groups serve the purpose of an immediate audience.

In general the act of sharing a piece of writing within a small group and getting feedback on what is and is not working encourages students to move outward from their own perspective and consider the reader's needs. Through group feedback, writers can learn whether or not their writing needs more detail, explanation, or clarification. Nystrand and Brandt (1989) assert that "intensive peer review works largely because it establishes reciprocity between writer and reader...it heightens writers' awareness of the balance their texts must strike between their own intentions and their readers' expectations" (p. 210). Sensitivity to audience can be enhanced through interactions within writing groups. Gere (1987) suggests that "writing groups reduce the distance between writer and reader" (p. 3). When students are writing with their audience in mind, they are self-monitoring and their writing is more clear and detailed.

It appears then that collaborative peer groups can help students become more aware of the needs of their audience and help them make the necessary revisions so that the writing meets those needs. Gere (1990) comments that writing groups can assist students in the revision process because "talk helps them identify and solve problems at many levels—word, sentence, paragraph, and whole piece of writing" (p. 117).

One of the main benefits then, of peer feedback discussions, is that writers can gain an outside perspective on their writing. According to Gere (1990):

> Students who participate in writing groups learn about the nature of writing. They develop a language to describe what they and others do to write, they learn about audience needs and expectations, and they develop criteria by which to evaluate writing. (p. 117)

As a result of a study of 25 college freshmen which looked at the development of audience awareness through the use of writing groups, Darling (1992) concluded that "students learned to concentrate on organization of thought and on clarity of expression" (p.10). In addition, he argued, "Peer review helps students to grow more sensitive to the need to communicate with an audience and to anticipate its responses" (pp. 5-6).

One interesting outcome of peer discussion is the activation of the writer's internal critic as heard through the voice of his/her peers. As a result of her research, Gere (1990) states:

> Many students claim that they internalize the voices of individuals in their writing groups so that, when they are writing, they imagine what a given person might say about the piece. This internalization of audience moves students one step closer to being effective critics of their own writing. (p. 124)

She therefore contends, "By imagining what a writing group member might say in response to a selection of writing, students broaden their critical capacities and develop a better ear for their own writing" (p. 124). This interim step in the student's thinking process of hearing others' voices may help to explain how writing groups are able to activate audience awareness in inexperienced writers. It may be the beginning of the movement of language from the intrapersonal (within the person) to the interpersonal (between persons) (The Ministry, 1987).

Other researchers have also found various benefits of writing groups. David (1985) studied 17 inexperienced college writers and how they approached the composition and revision process. She found that student writings improved as a result of peer evaluation. Students who worked in writing groups demonstrated increased autonomy—the recognition that they ultimately were responsible for their revisions, and that they were capable of solving their own problems within their own writings. Students said that they had benefited from watching others experiment with revisions. David adds, "They get ideas of what to add, what to drop, and what to leave alone" (p. 33). Again, students indicated the value of the immediacy of response of the peer group. When reading aloud to the group, some writers could identify immediately what didn't make sense in their compositions. In another study, Coleman (1987) observed five inexperienced college freshmen in a writing class which employed peer response groups. She found that by the end of the course, students were self-monitoring and critically evaluating their own writings—activities they weren't doing before working in writing groups. O'Donnell et al. (1985) compared the performance of college students who worked independently with those who worked cooperatively on the task of writing instructions. They found that students in the groups wrote more communicatively; in other words, the purpose of the writing was clear, it was organized according to steps, and it was arranged in a logical order. The researchers also noted that there seemed to be a carry-over effect in that students who worked cooperatively in the experimental group in the beginning also wrote more communicatively than did members of the control group later on when they worked independently. Gere (1990) summarizes the findings of many researchers when she suggests that "writing groups foster audience awareness,

enabling student writers to move away from their own perspectives and consider what information their readers will need" (p. 123). Some of the potential benefits then of peer discussion groups are that they can help foster audience awareness by exposing inexperienced writers to new ideas and ways of approaching the task; groups can enable students to gain an outside perspective on their writing; and writers can learn what the reader needs from them in order to be understood.

Writing Groups—Disadvantages

There is not, however, total agreement among researchers that peer discussion groups are beneficial. Some studies have found neutral or even negative effects of peer evaluation upon students' writings. In her survey of research, Herrmann (1989) cites a 1985 study by Gere and Stevens which indicated there were wide individual differences in student responses to peer feedback, with some students even becoming hostile during the discussions. Herrmann examined a 1985 study by Russell in which some students became dependent upon peer comments for their revisions. She also reviewed a study by Rijlaarsdam (1987) which showed no differences between 11 classes of students, half of which received peer feedback and half which received no feedback. Other studies have also demonstrated disadvantages. For example, Craig (1982, as cited in Hillocks, 1986) studied college freshmen in composition classes and investigated the effects of peer discussion at three points in the writing process: before the first draft, after the first draft, and after the final draft. She found no significant differences in students' writings between the three methods. Similarly, in their study of grade six children, Weppler and Moore (1996) found no differences between individuals and pairs in terms of writing improvement.

One possible explanation for the differences in results of the various studies is the complex nature of writing. The writing process varies widely depending on the *type* of writing task being undertaken. In addition, the composition and organization of the writing groups themselves is central to their success. Tebo-Messina (1993) proposes that writing groups are microcosms of society with their own unique sets of rules and behaviors. Group members negotiate their own rules and have distinct forms of communication. All these factors combine to impact on the effectiveness of each group, which in turn influences the writings of its members. In a study of cooperative writing groups in a community college setting, Bryan (1996) found that the establishment of a safe atmosphere through team building is crucial to the success of groups. She also discovered that clear and specific guidelines and objectives are essential in order for students to receive constructive and useful feedback on their writings in peer groups. Each writing group then, has its own nature and structure which affects each member of the group and influences the results of any study about their effectiveness. Finally, the measures used to determine writing improvement vary widely between the cited studies. Due to the complex nature of our language, most measures of writing proficiency are highly subjective, despite numerous efforts to make them less so.

Summary

While overall results of studies into the efficacy of writing groups are mixed, there is still the widespread belief in the field of education that they do enhance the development of audience awareness. Imel (1994) reminds us that we never learn something so well as when we teach it to someone else. She suggests that "both learners are likely to understand the material better by applying it in the peer tutoring setting"

(p. 3). Perhaps then, writing groups actually benefit the person *giving* the feedback more than the one *receiving* it. However, since students in groups generally rotate positions, taking turns as both the writer and the giver of feedback, the benefits are shared among the group members.

The act of talking and listening within peer groups has the potential, not only of improving writing skills, but also of increasing cognitive development. Gere (1985) suggests that "collaborative learning is particularly effective in writing instruction because talking gives students an opportunity to internalize language which can later be re-externalized in writing" (p. 364). On the other hand, Bruffee (1985) points out a problem inherent in the act of discussing writing when he asserts:

> Using language to make decisions about language complicates the problem because in order to think about the subject we are judging...we also have to think about how our minds are working, how we are using language to make that judgment. This process can feel as awkward as trying to cut our own hair while looking in a mirror. The only way we can work our way through the tangle of language used to talk about language is to try to get outside our personal, unshared biases and preconceptions. We must try to see the world as other people seem to see it. (p. 6)

One of the best ways to do so appears to be through discussions in groups of our peers. Vacca and Linek (1992) contend, "Talk helps students put thinking into words and ensures that thinking about new ideas actually happens" (p. 150).

For those who have difficulty revising, writing groups can have important benefits. Peers can offer encouragement, show what portions of the writing are unclear,

and give feedback as to whether there is either too much or not enough detail. Due to its specificity, writers often feel that peer feedback is more genuine and more helpful than teachers' comments. Through group discussion, fellow members can learn other styles of writing and alternate methods of approaching the process. Perhaps most importantly, students can develop an awareness of the needs of their audience through the internalization of the voices of their fellow students.

On the whole, ABE students have difficulty revising their writings. While much research exists pointing to the effectiveness and the potential advantages of writing groups for children and for those with more advanced skills at the college and university level, little research has been done with ABE students. The question to be looked at then is whether, for ABE students, peer feedback in writing groups is more effective in encouraging revision and increasing audience awareness than working independently.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Participants

Ten adult students (eight females and two males) who were enrolled in a fundamental level (Grades 1-9) English class at a university college in British Columbia were invited to participate in the study. Due to work obligations and illness, two students were unable to participate, and three others chose not to become part of the study. Out of the ten, five female students joined the study, and they all remained until its conclusion. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 43, with their average age being 34.

The participants were already familiar with one another and had worked frequently on various tasks in groups of different combinations for two months prior to the study. This was, however, the first time they had peer-conferenced about revising their writings.

Instruments

The Writing Checklist (Appendix 1) was designed to be used by participants as a revision guide for their essays. The Writing Checklist is an adaptation of similar tools by Dawe et al. (1984); Shurbutt (1987); and Spandel & Stiggins (1990). Unlike those checklists, however, the Writing Checklist does not include such aspects as spelling and sentence structure since participants were not expected to know how to make those kinds of corrections. Also, it was felt that a focus on mechanics might distract students from the intended emphasis on meaning; only the aspects that pertained to audience needs were selected (Armbruster, 1984). Items on the checklist were written in simple language that was easy for the participants to understand, and only the aspects of writing

that we had already discussed in class were included on the checklist (Appendix 1). For example, the use of transitions was not included in the checklist since that information had not been covered in class prior to the study.

The Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale (Appendix 2) is an adaptation of several writing assessment scales: the Sense of Audience Primary Trait Scale (Gregg et al., 1996), the English Placement Test (Dawe et al., 1984), and the Analytic Rating Scale (Gomez et al., 1996). A primary trait scoring tool was chosen because, according to Dawe et al. (1984), "Primary trait scoring is based on the notion that the effectiveness of a piece of writing is related to the effectiveness of the writer in fulfilling his or her intentions in terms of an audience" (p. 7). The criteria adopted from the aforementioned assessment tools are ones which have been identified as audience needs (Armbruster, 1984). They were also criteria which fell within the students' range of abilities. As with the checklist (Appendix 1), mechanical aspects of writing such as sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and use of transitions (Dawe et al, 1984; Spandel & Stiggins, 1990) were not included in the evaluation since, for the purpose of this study, they were not central to the measurement of audience awareness (Armbruster, 1984).

The Student Feedback Questionnaire (Appendix 3) was used at the close of the study to interview the participants about their experience.

Procedure

Prior to the Study. A letter outlining the purpose of the study and requesting permission to use the data collected from the students' writings was sent to the university college campus dean (Appendix 5), and he responded with a letter of permission

(Appendix 6). Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the ethics committees of the two institutions involved (Appendices 7 and 8).

Prior to the study, a second evaluator was recruited in an effort to achieve a greater consistency of measurement. The evaluators both scored a set of fifteen anonymous student writings using the Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale (Appendix 2) in order to establish inter-rater reliability. Reliability between the two evaluators was 98.6%.

Participant Recruitment. Initial contact with the participants took place during the students' normally-scheduled English class. Students were informed of the nature and purpose of the study and what would be expected of them as participants. Students were given assurance that their class standing would not be affected if they chose not to participate, and they were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. They were assured that their anonymity would be protected by the use of identity numbers in place of their names on their writings. Also, it was explained that their writings and the evaluation of them would be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office.

Students were given a copy of the introductory letter and the informed consent form (Appendix 4). The researcher read aloud the letter and the consent form while the students followed along. Students were given time to ask questions about the study. The five who chose to participate signed the consent form and received a personal copy of it later that day.

The Pretest. The study was set up so that the control group would work independently to revise their writings with the help of the Writing Checklist

(Appendix 1). The experimental group would discuss each others' writings using the checklist as the format for their discussions. The next step then was to assign the students to one of two groups. Participants were given an initial writing assignment—the pretest—to describe a special trip they took or a special event they attended. The task of describing an event was chosen because it "is considered to be the easiest form of written text structure for inexperienced writers" (Gregg et al., 1996, p. 127). Students were given the choice to either write their first draft directly onto the computer or to write it out by hand and then type it on the computer. They were given whatever time they needed to revise their writings but did not receive feedback or help in that activity from their instructor. They were also asked not to converse with other students about their writing. With the exception of one student who did not have access to a computer and who turned in a hand-written copy, participants provided a computer printout of their writing to the researcher. Students took approximately one hour to complete this first writing assignment.

The participants' writing samples were evaluated on the Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale (Appendix 2) by the two evaluators. The range of possible scores on this scale is from 7 to 35. The scores for each participant were averaged and ranged from 21 to 27. The two evaluators' averaged scores were within one point of each other on this initial assessment.

The average scores were then put in order from highest to lowest. The two highest scores were paired, and a coin was flipped to determine in which group the students would be placed. The same procedure was followed for the second pair. The coin was flipped to determine the placement of the fifth participant. The group of three

was chosen to be the experimental group—the writing group. The group of two became the control group—the students who worked independently on their revisions.

The Practice Test. The following week, during their normally-scheduled writing time, students were given a list of their names and were asked to choose a number and place it beside their name. They were instructed to use this number on the next two writing assignments in place of their name. One student agreed to keep this list in case participants forgot their identity numbers. (The researcher and the other evaluator did not have access to the list until all assignments had been evaluated.) Participants were informed as to which group they had been assigned.

The subjects were then given copies of the Writing Checklist (Appendix 1). The checklist was read aloud by the researcher, and the terms and concepts were reviewed and discussed with the participants.

Both groups were then given a second writing assignment—the practice test—to describe a scary moment or close call they had experienced. Students wrote their rough drafts by hand. Subjects in the control group were instructed to go through the Writing Checklist independently and make revisions to their writings based upon their own responses to the checklist. When they finished, they typed their final draft on the computer. Students were allowed as much time as they needed for these various writing tasks. Both students completed the assignment in less than 1.5 hours.

When the participants in the experimental group finished their rough drafts, they went into a room by themselves and were given extra copies of the checklist. They were instructed to take turns reading their stories aloud. They were then to discuss each item on the checklist as it related to the individuals' writings. Students were offered the option

of having photocopies of the writings to look at while going through the checklist. They all declined the offer, indicating that they preferred to only listen to the person read their story. Participants were encouraged to write comments on the checklist and give them to the person when they were finished, but they were not required to do so. The writers were also encouraged to take notes during the discussion of their stories for future reference. They were informed that it was their choice whether or not to incorporate the suggestions or comments they received from the group into their writings. The subjects were allowed to take as much time as they needed to discuss the writings. Participants in this group took approximately 2 hours to create their first drafts, discuss them, and then revise their writings.

Participants from both groups printed their final drafts, using their identity numbers instead of their names and then placed them in a designated envelope near the door of the room. On the front of the envelope was a list of their names, and they marked off their names as they left the room.

The Posttest. The next week, the same procedure was followed for another writing assignment—the posttest—which was to tell about a funny or happy childhood event.

Evaluation Methods. All of the writings were then assessed on the basis of the Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale (Appendix 2) by the two evaluators. In addition, because of the small sample size and the nature of the study, participants were interviewed following the posttest using the Student Feedback Questionnaire (Appendix 3). The perceptions of the students and their attitudes toward the various activities were as important as the quantitative information gathered in this short study. A semi-

structured format (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997) was chosen. The questionnaire consisted of specific questions but allowed for a wide range of individual responses.

Chapter 3

Results

Data Collected

Table 1 lists the scores obtained on the pretest writing assignment for all participants. The averaged scores for the control group were 23 and 27 with a mean of 25. For the experimental group, the averaged scores ranged from 21 to 26.5 with an overall mean of 24.2. The evaluators' average scores for all five participants were within one point of each other on this test.

Table 1

Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale Pretest Scores

	Score of Evaluator 1	Score of Evaluator 2	Mean
Individual Writers			
1	30	24	27
2	23	23	23
Average	26.5	23.5	25
Writing Group			
1	20	22	21
2	23	27	25
3	24	29	26.5
Average	22.3	26	24.2

Table 2 lists the scores obtained on the practice writing assignment for the participants. The range of averaged scores for the control group was from 22.5 to 25 with the mean being 23.8. For the experimental group, the average scores ranged from 20 to 28.5 with an overall mean of 23.5. The evaluators' average scores for all five participants were within .4 of a point of each other.

Table 2

Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale Practice Scores

	Score of Evaluator 1	Score of Evaluator 2	Mean
Individual Writers			
1	23	27	25
2	26	19	22.5
Average	24.5	23	23.8
Writing Group			
1	28	29	28.5
2	21	23	22
3	19	21	20
Average	22.7	24.3	23.5

Table 3 contains the scores from the posttest. The control group's average scores ranged from 19.5 to 26.5 with a mean of 23. The experimental group's range was from 22 to 26 with an overall mean of 24.7. The evaluators' average scores for all participants were within 2 points on the posttest.

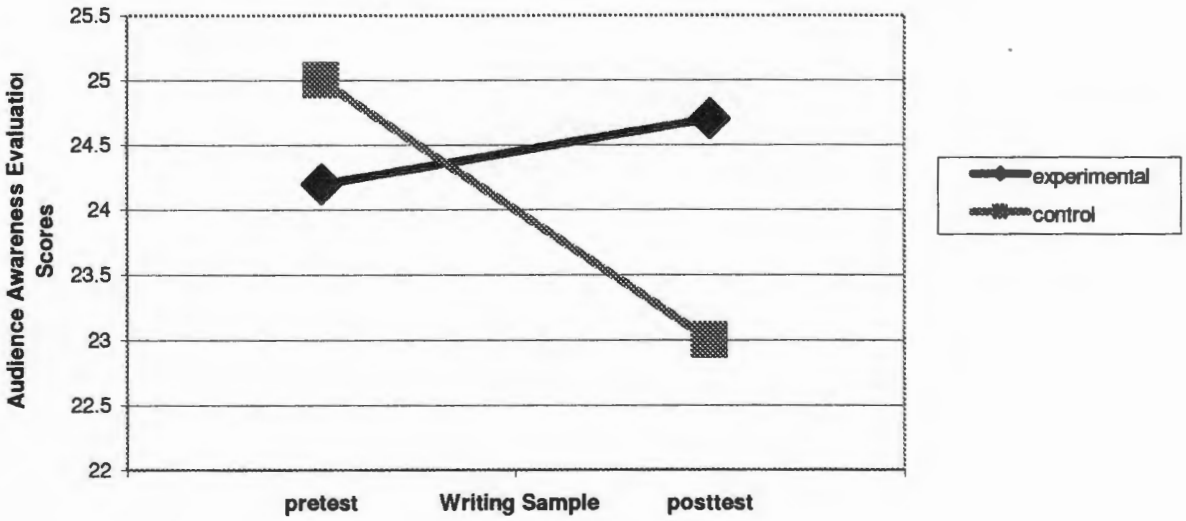
Table 3

Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale Posttest Scores

	Score of Evaluator 1	Score of Evaluator 2	Mean
Individual Writers			
1	26	27	26.5
2	23	16	19.5
Average	24.5	21.5	23
Writing Group			
1	23	21	22
2	26	26	26
3	27	25	26
Average	25.3	24	24.7

The scores for the two groups were averaged, and the differences between the pretest and the posttest scores for each are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Average Scores for Writing Groups and Independent Writers



As can be seen from Figure 1, there was a slight increase in the average scores from the pretest to the posttest for the experimental group from 24.2 to 24.7, and there was a decrease in the average scores of the control group from 25 to 23. In an attempt to determine whether there was a difference between the two groups, a two-tailed independent *t* test was used because the literature is not unanimous as to the benefits of writing groups. Since this was a small study, the alpha level was set at .1, and, as the literature suggests (see, e.g., May, Masson, & Hunter, 1990), making a Type 1 error and failing to reject the null hypothesis does not necessarily preclude the use of writing groups in the classroom. If a full-scale study were to be conducted with larger samples, more rigorous criteria might be chosen in order to correctly reject the null hypothesis. Table 4 shows the results for the differences between the two groups.

Table 4

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances

	one	*two*
Mean	0.5	-2
Variance	0.75	4.5
Observations	3	2
Pooled Variance	2	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	3	
t Stat	1.936492	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.07411	
t Critical one-tail	1.637745	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.14822	
t Critical two-tail	2.353363	

Because the observed value of the *t* statistic (t_{obs} = 1.94) did not exceed the critical value for alpha = .10 (t_{crit} = 2.35), the results were not statistically significant. The data does not support the hypothesis that writing groups improve revisions. However, there was an upward trend in the average scores of the writing group, indicating that perhaps in a study of longer duration with an increased sample size, a statistical difference might be observed. Clearly, the small sample size resulted in a lack of statistical power to detect a difference.

Participant Interviews

Participants were interviewed about their experience in the study based on the Student Feedback Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Personal interviews often yield useful information about the participants' experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997) that cannot be obtained from the numerical analysis. In particular, I wanted explore their opinions, attitudes, and concerns about the use of checklists and writing groups.

Since I felt that the students' limited writing skills could potentially restrict the extent and quality of their responses, I did not give them the questionnaire to complete on their own. I thought that students' verbal responses would be more comprehensive, so I interviewed them individually and wrote down their responses as they were speaking. A tape recorder was not used during the interview because I felt the students might be intimidated by it and be inclined to give less complete and candid answers to the questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997).

When participants were interviewed, both members of the control group felt that the Writing Checklist (Appendix 1) was helpful in making revisions. One student said, "It made you think about what your wrote about. It made you go back and read your work." The other one stated, "I erased some things I'd already written down because I realized I could delete some sentences because I'd repeated myself." Both students volunteered that they thought working on their own was preferable to being in a discussion group when it came to revising their writings. Apparently, in their minds, the fear of possible criticism still outweighed any potential positive comments, fresh ideas or encouragement that might have come from peers in a group setting. The two independent writers said they felt that the checklist was helpful in the revision process because it encouraged them to review separately the various aspects of their writing.

The members of the experimental group indicated that when they read their own stories out loud to the others, they could hear things that needed to be changed. Their comments are supported by David (1985) who draws attention to the "power and importance of the speaking part of the speaking listening connection" (p. 45). One student said that after she heard herself read her story, she rewrote some sentences

because they didn't sound right and some seemed too long. All of the writing group members said they got a few ideas on how to improve their writing from other group members, but when asked to describe the nature of those changes, it appears they were mostly at the word level. For example, the participants reported that their discussions were mainly about vocabulary alternatives. One said that she made her composition shorter as a result of comments by other members. No one mentioned having discussions about some of the more complicated aspects of writing such as whether introductions and conclusions were effective and whether there was a sense of order to the writing. It appears then that the discussion group's effect was mostly limited to vocabulary choices for the participants in this study.

Chapter 4

Discussion

The non-significant results found in the study can be explained, at least in part, by the unfortunately small sample size and the shortness of the study. While it might be argued that there was a small improvement in the experimental group's writing scores, there was a corresponding decrease in the control group's scores. This decrease would not normally be expected since it could be reasonably presupposed that students would improve, at least marginally, in their writing from pre- to posttest simply as a result of instruction, maturation and practice (The Ministry, 1987). On the other hand, the decrease in the control group's scores might be attributed to the fact that they were asked to perform basically the same task three times, and they may have gotten bored with it by the third time. The experimental group, conversely, only did the same task twice and may have also been less bored as a result of their group discussions.

Sample Size

Several factors in the design and implementation of the study combined to limit the interpretation of the data collected. As mentioned, most obvious is the small sample size. Although I did not ask the three non-participating students why they chose not to join the study, it was my impression that they were concerned about the possibility of being placed in the group that had to read and discuss their compositions with others. This opinion is based upon the types of questions the students asked when the study was introduced to them. In fact, even some of the students who agreed to participate expressed a desire to be placed in the independent writers group because they didn't want to share their writings and have them discussed in a group setting.

The Nature of the Task

This fear of criticism is a perfectly natural response. According to Gere (1990), "Sharing one's writing with others is always a somewhat threatening experience—even for experienced writers" (p. 126). For inexperienced adults with a history of negative school experiences, her words seem to hold even more truth. Prior to the study, the students had worked cooperatively in groups and knew each other well, but they were still generally resistant to the idea of exposing their writing to possible criticism from peers. Even though the potential benefits of peer feedback were explained to them, it didn't seem to allay some of the students' fears enough for them to consent to become participants in the study.

Incorporating Peers' Comments

Another possible explanation for the non-significant results was that participants in the experimental group were given the choice whether or not to make changes to their writings based on peers' comments. If they decided not to incorporate ideas suggested by others, their writings probably would not show significant improvement.

Objectivity and Writing Styles

One problem encountered in the evaluation of the writings was the use of different fonts by the subjects for their final drafts. Because students had written several compositions for me prior to the study, I was familiar with their use of favorite fonts. While this wasn't an issue for the other evaluator, my role as instructor/researcher allowed me to have knowledge of some of the participants' identities and, therefore, capabilities. This information put my objectivity and the reliability of my own

evaluations in question. In retrospect, I should have either required all participants to use the same font for their final draft or used two outside evaluators to assess the writings

Length of the Study

Another limitation of the study was the short, pretest-posttest design (Weeks & White, 1982). Students were given three event-description writing assignments. The first one was for the purpose of separating them into the control and experimental groups. Only two writings then were used to note any potential improvement through the use of writing groups. Often it takes more than two sessions for writing groups to establish themselves as coordinated, functioning, and effective teams (Gere, 1990; Tebo-Messina, 1993). Incorporating more writing opportunities into the study design might have shown a more consistent pattern of results. Unfortunately, due to curriculum requirements, I could not spend more than three weeks on the writing genre of event description. At the same time, I felt that it was important to use only one type of writing in the study; therefore, the number of writings was necessarily limited. It might be argued that a similar study design could be employed throughout the semester, and over that length of time, different writing genres could be used successfully. That type of design, however, could create ethical problems relating to student progress, depending on which group they were in.

Use of Checklists

When I interviewed the three members of the experimental group, they admitted that they had not used the checklist as the basis of their discussions. They said they simply talked about the writings. While I had checked in on the group from time to time making sure they were on task and seeing if they needed any help or direction, I did not

stay with them long enough to interrupt their discussions and did not notice they were not making use of the checklist. Their failure to follow directions was a problem for the outcome of the study because the same format was not being adhered to by both groups during the revision process. In retrospect, I should have directed the students to not only comment verbally to the writer, but to write down their ideas on the checklist as they went through it, then give it to the writer at the end of the discussion. In this way, I believe the checklist would have been used instead of being overlooked by the participants.

The Value of Writing Groups

When the experimental group was interviewed, all three indicated that the group members were respectful toward one another, and two of them said they felt comfortable sharing their stories within the group. This observation was surprising given the concern expressed by many participants at the beginning of the study about discussing their own work with others. Two group members stated that they really didn't learn anything from listening to and discussing other people's stories, which is contrary to the results of this research and that obtained from others (David, 1985). Perhaps learning did occur from their experience, but they failed to recognize it as such. The third said that she learned how to word things differently so as not to repeat herself by listening to and discussing other people's work. In general, one student didn't think the writing group was very helpful. The other two indicated that they had received good suggestions from the group members and that being in the group had been a positive experience for them. Perhaps the telling detail of those two interviews, however, was the tone of their responses—neither were particularly enthusiastic when they answered affirmatively about the value

of the group, so they may have been, consciously or unconsciously, telling me what they thought I wanted to hear.

Implications for Instruction

The purpose of the study was to determine whether group discussion was more effective than working independently to encourage revision and enhance audience awareness. While the writing group's scores improved slightly, as reported also by Weeks and White (1982) and Coleman (1987), the extremely small sample size hinders any conclusions about its efficacy from being drawn from the data.

The most important information, then, seems to come from the students' comments about their experience and from the introduction of the Writing Checklist (Appendix 1). Since part of the problem of students' poor revising skills is simply that they tend to not critically re-read their composition once it has been written, the checklist appears to be a way of encouraging a re-examination of their thoughts (Dawe et al., 1984). The independent writers who used it indicated that the checklist helped them to "see" things that needed to be changed in their writing. Similar benefits would probably have been noted by the writing group had they employed the checklist in their discussions.

The other important information obtained from the students' comments is that despite an initial reluctance to share their writing in groups, the students indicated that, at least to some degree, the act of discussing their writings with others improved their sense of what the reader needs from them as a writer. This was either as a result of peer comments or through the process of hearing themselves reading their stories aloud.

Future Considerations

A study of similar design but of longer duration and larger sample size might help to confirm these observations. A larger class in which at least two writing groups could be formed would be preferable. More time spent prior to the study getting groups used to sharing, offering constructive feedback, and encouraging one another would likely enable students to feel more comfortable about joining a study such as this one. Perhaps more group work prior to the study, and in particular, the sharing of other kinds of writings, would have helped overcome their reticence. Gere (1990) suggests that students share journal entries or anecdotes in order to better get to know and trust each other. In addition, Imel (1994) points out that "practice in encouraging, restating, clarifying, validating and summarizing can help [students] assume their role as peer tutor" (p. 3). In general, spending more time prior to the study creating a "climate for sharing" (Weeks and White, 1982, p. 5) would likely have resulted in a more relaxed attitude toward the idea of students discussing their writings with each other.

I would also recommend using at least six writing samples in order to track and note any possible improvement as a result of the use of writing groups. In addition, I think that three evaluators should be used instead of two for even greater consistency of measurement, and they should be individuals who are not familiar with the histories and writing styles of the participants. An instructor/evaluator knows the students and their abilities and may unconsciously base his/her evaluations, at least in part, on the writer's past performance.

It might also be more productive for someone other than the instructor/researcher to conduct the questionnaires at the end of the study. Using this approach, participants

might offer more candid observations about their experiences to a person who is not their teacher.

Conclusion

It appears then from the participants' comments that some type of intervention between the rough draft stage and the final draft—one which encourages the student to take a fresh look at what he or she has written, whether that is in the form of a checklist, a discussion, or simply reading the composition aloud—has the potential to be effective in encouraging revisions and increasing audience awareness in student writers.

References

Armbruster, B. (1984). The problem of "Inconsiderate Text." In G.C. Duffy, L.R. Roehler, & J. Mason, *Comprehension instruction: Perspectives and suggestions* (pp. 202-217). New York: Longman.

Bouton, K., & Tutty, G. (1975, Fall). The effect of peer-evaluated student composition on writing improvement. *The English Record, 26*, 64-69.

Bruffee, K.A. (1985). *A short course in writing.* Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Bryan, L.H. (1996, November). Cooperative writing groups in community college. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy 40*, 188-93.

Coleman, E. (1987, March). *Response groups as a source of data for classroom based research.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (38), Atlanta, GA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 281 192)

Darling, G.J. (1992, March). *Who is my audience? Speech-act theory and the composition classroom.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (43), Cincinnati, OH. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 344 213)

David, D.L. (1985). An ethnographic investigation of talk in small group writing workshops in a college writing class, *EDRS Report (143).* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 285 154)

Dawe, A., Watson, W., Harrison, D. (1984*) Assessing English Skills: Writing.* Victoria, BC: Ministry of Education.

Gere, A.R. (1985, December). Talking about writing: The language of writing groups. *Research in the Teaching of English, 19*, 362-385.

Gere, A.R. (1987). *Writing groups: History, theory, and implications*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University.

Gere, A.R. (1990). Talking in writing groups. In S. Hynds, & D.L. Rubin (Eds.), *Perspectives on talk and learning* (pp. 115-128). Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Gomez, R., Parker, R., Alecio, R.A., Gomez, L. (1996). Process versus product writing with limited English proficient students. *The Bilingual Research Journal, 20*, 209-233.

Gregg, N., Sigalas, S., Hoy, C., Wisenbaker, J., & McKinley, C. (1996). Sense of audience and the adult writer: A study across competence levels. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 8*, 121-37.

Herrmann, A.W. (1989, May 1). Teaching writing with peer response groups. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 307 616)

Hicks, D. (Ed.) (1996). *Discourse, learning and schooling*. New York: Cambridge University.

Hillocks, G. (1986). *Research on written composition*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills.

Hillocks, G. (1992). Reconciling the qualitative and quantitative. In R. Beach, J.L. Green, M.L. Kamil, & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Mutidisciplinary perspectives on literacy research* (pp. 57-65). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Imel, S. (1994, January 1). Peer tutoring in adult basic and literacy education. *ERIC Digest* No. EDO-CE-94-46. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 368 891)

McCarthy, S.J., & Raphael, T.E. (1992). Alternative research perspectives. In J.W. Irwin, & M.A. Doyle (Eds.), *Reading/writing connections: Learning from research* (pp. 2-30). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

McMillan, J.H., & Schumacher, S. (1997). *Research in education*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

Matsuhashi, A, & Gordon, E. (1985). "Revision, addition, and the power of the unseen text," in S.H. Freedman (Ed.) *The acquisition of written language*, Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

May, R.B., Masson, M.E.J. & Hunter, M.A. (1990). Application of statistics in behavioral research. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training (1987). *Adult basic literacy curriculum guide and resource book*. Victoria, BC: Province of British Columbia.

Nystrand, M. (1986). *The structure of written communication: Studies in reciprocity between writers and readers*. New York: Academic Press.

Nystrand, M., & Brandt, D. (1989). Response to writing as a context for learning to write. In C.M. Anson (Ed.), *Writing and response: Theory, practice, and research*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

O'Donnell, A.M., Dansereau, D.F., Rocklin, T., Lambiotte, J.G., Hythecker, V.I., & Larson, C.O. (1985, July). Cooperative writing: Direct effects and transfer. *Written Communication, 2*, 307-15.

Sainsbury, M. (1992*). Meaning, communication and understanding in the Classroom.* Aldershot, UK: Avebury.

Shurbutt, S.B. (1987, Spring). Student peer evaluation: A practical approach. *Arizona Education Bulletin*, 22-24.

Spandel, V., & Stiggins, R.J. (1990) *Creating writers: Linking assessment and writing instruction,* White Plains, NY: Longman.

Tebo-Messina, M. (1993, Spring). Collaborative learning: How well does it work? *Writing on the Edge, 4* (2), 63-79.

Vacca, R.T., & Linek, W.M. (1992). Writing to learn. In J.W Irwin, & M.A. Doyle (Eds.), *Reading/writing connections: Learning from research* (pp. 145-59). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Weeks, J.O. & White, M.B. (1982). *Peer editing versus teacher editing: Does it make a difference?* Paper presented at the Meeting of the North Carolina Council of the International Reading Association, Charlotte, NC. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 224 014)

White, M. (1990), *Getting the story out: Four adults learning to write.* (Unpublished thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Education), Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta.

Weppler, M.E., & Moore, J.P. (1996, June). The effects of co-operative and individual writing: Does choice make a difference? *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, pp. 149-56.

Appendix 1: Writing Checklist

Writer's Name_____ Title_____

Peer Evaluator's Name_____

1. Is the topic sentence clear, and does it catch your interest? How might it be improved?

2. Does the writing stay on topic, or does it wander off onto other topics? Point out where.

3. Is there a logical order to the writing? Show where ideas might be out of place.

4. Are there enough details and examples? Where might you add information?

5. Are there too many details? What might you take out?

6. Which words or phrases could be changed to make the meaning more clear?

7. Is the conclusion effective? Does it end suddenly or drag on too long? How might you end it differently?

Comments:

Appendix 2: Audience Awareness Evaluation Scale

Student Number_____ Writing Sample Number_____

Name of Evaluator_____

Rate each item on a scale of 1--5. (5 =excellent, 1=poor or absent)

	Suitable introduction, topic sentence clearly defined
	Stays on topic, is focused on theme
	Topic fully developed: important details, illustrations and examples are present
	Ideas presented in a logical sequence, has a sense of order
	Incidental details and description minimized, not too much information
	Appropriate choice of vocabulary, ideas clearly expressed
	Effective conclusion, writing feels finished
	Total Score

Appendix 3: Student Feedback Questionnaire

Interviewer: I am going to ask you some questions about your experience as a participant in this study. If you wish to add anything or to explain your answers more fully, please feel free to do so.

1. Were you in a writing group, or did you work independently?

2. Do you think the Writing Checklist helped you revise your assignments? If so, how?

3. If you were not in a writing group, do you have any further comments?

4. If you were in a writing group:

   a. During the discussions, did you write down your comments on the Checklist for the other group members, or did you only provide verbal comments?

   b. Did you get ideas about things you wanted to change from hearing yourself read your own story out loud? Explain.

   c. Did you get ideas of things to change or ways to improve your writings from the discussions? Explain.

d. Did you feel comfortable sharing your story within the group? If not, what might have been done to make you feel more at ease?

e. Were group members respectful to each other when giving suggestions?

f. What, if anything, did you learn from listening to other people's stories?

g. Would you say that participating in the discussion group improved your writings? In what ways?

h. Would you recommend using writing groups to help other students improve their writings?

i. Do you have any other comments about your writing group experience?

Appendix 4: Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent Form

March 4, 2002

Dear Student:

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by your instructor, Mary Madden, who is a graduate student at UNBC. You have been chosen to take part in this study because the research is to be conducted in the English 030 class during the Winter 2002 term.

The information collected from this study will be reported as a Master's Degree project, but will not identify you in any way. One other instructor, Sheila Ramsay, will have access to your writing assignments, but you will not be identified by name on your writings. The data from this study and your writings will be kept in my office in a locked file cabinet.

Your assignments and the amount of time you spend on them will be the same, whether you choose to be involved in the study or not. The benefit to you is that, as a result of one of the two methods used in class, you may find that your ability to revise your writings will improve.

If you choose not to participate in this study, your class standing and your marks will not be affected, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Any concerns or comments about this project should be directed to the Office of Research, UNBC, Prince George, and to Jeff McLaughlin, Chair of the Research and Ethics, Human Subjects Committee, UCC, Kamloops, 371-5734.

I will be happy to provide you a copy of the results of the study when it becomes available. If you have any questions about this study, I encourage you to ask me.

Sincerely,

Mary Madden
Researcher

THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF THE CARIBOO

Informed Consent by Subjects to Participate in a Research Project or Experiment

Note: The University College and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures, risks and benefits involved.

Having been asked by Mary Madden of the College and Career Preparation Division/Department of The University College of the Cariboo, telephone number 392-8161, to participate in a research project entitled: Adult Learners, Writing Groups, and Revisions encompassing the following purpose and procedures and time commitment: The purpose of the study is to determine whether peer feedback in writing groups is more effective in encouraging revisions than working independently for Adult Basic Education students.

I understand the procedures to be used on this project and the personal risks to me in taking part.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw my participation in this project at any time without consequence. My involvement or non-involvement in this project is in no way related to my employment contract or to my status as a patient or student.

I also understand that I may ask any questions or register any complaint I might have about the project with either the chief researcher named above or with Lucille Anderson, Chairperson of the College and Career Preparation Department, Williams Lake, or with Dr. Jeff McLaughlin, Chair, Research Ethics Committee – Human Subjects (phone 371-5734), The University College of the Cariboo.

Informed Consent by Subjects to Participate in a Research Project or Experiment (Page 2)

Copies of the results of this study, upon its completion, may be obtained by contacting:

Mary Madden at 392-8161

I agree to complete the assigned writings and to work within my assigned group.

(State what the subject will do)

as described above, during the period: February through April 2002

at The University College of the Cariboo, English 030 class, Yorston Street Location
(place where procedures will be carried out)

NAME (Please print):

ADDRESS:

I have read and understood the above information regarding this project and voluntarily agree to participate in the project. I understand that my identity and any information obtained will be kept confidential through the process of assigning participants an identity number to be used on their writings, and all writings and data will be stored in a locked file cabinet.

I have received a copy of this consent form and a subject feedback form.

SIGNATURE:

WITNESS:

DATE:

Appendix 5: Request for Letter of Permission

January 31, 2002

Mr. Rob Anderson
Campus Dean
University College of the Cariboo
301-383 Oliver St.
Williams Lake, BC
V2G 1M4

Dear Rob:

As a graduate student of UNBC, I am preparing to conduct a research project called "Adult Students, Writing Groups, and Revisions." I am proposing to study whether peer feedback in writing groups improves audience awareness in ABE students.

It is my plan to ask my English 030 students to participate in the study. Their class standing would not be affected if they choose not to participate, and they would be free to withdraw from the study at any time. If they choose to participate, they will be asked to sign a consent form in accordance with UCC and UNBC policy.

Students will be asked to complete three to four writings assignments, which are already course requirements. As part of the study, some will work independently on the revision of their assignments and some will work in peer groups. Students currently collaborate in groups on class assignments, so they would not be doing anything beyond what is normally required of them.

The students' anonymity will be maintained throughout the study and in my discussion of the results. I am asking your permission to use the students' writings to gather data for this project.

If you have any questions or require more information, I will be happy to supply you with a copy of my proposal.

Sincerely,

Mary Madden

E
IVERSITY
LLEGE
THE
RIBOO

ms Lake
us

3 Oliver Street
Lake, B.C., Canada

e (250) 392-8000
(250) 392-4984
1-800-663-4936

Appendix 6: Letter of Approval from Dean

Ms. Mary Madden
The University College of the Cariboo
301 – 383 Oliver Street
Williams Lake, British Columbia
V2G 1M4

February 7, 2002

Dear Mary:

I have received your letter dated January 31, 2002, regarding your request to conduct a research project entitled "Adult Students, Writing Groups, and Revisions".

Given use of the written procedures in your letter, you have my permission to use the writings of English 030 students to conduct your study. I believe it will be a worthwhile project and I would be interested in knowing your results.

Yours truly,

Rob Anderson
Dean

sm

Appendix 7: UNBC Research Ethics Board Letter of Approval

UNBC

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Research Ethics Board

MEMORANDUM

To: **Mary Madden**
RR1 Bush Rd., Williams Lake

Dr. Paul Madak
Education Program

From: **Alex Michalos, Chair,**
Research Ethics Board

Date: **February 26, 2002**

Re: **EP2002.0213.26**
Adult Learners, Writing Groups, and Revisions

Thank you for submitting the above noted proposal to the UNBC Research Ethics Board. Your proposal has been independently reviewed by two reviewers and approved. You may proceed with your project.

Good luck in your research.

Alex Michalos, Chair
Research Ethics Board

Appendix 8: UCC Research Ethics Board Letter of Approval

The University College of the Cariboo Ethics Committee
For Research and Other Studies Involving Human Subjects

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	DEPARTMENT	NUMBER
Mary Madden	**College & Career Prep, Williams Lake**	**2001-02/14/A**

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT
UCC and UNBC
CO-INVESTIGATORS
n/a
SPONSORING AGENCIES
UNBC
TITLE
Adult Learners, Writing Groups, and Revision

APPROVAL DATE	TERM (YEARS)	AMENDED
13 March, 2002	**2**	

CERTIFICATION

The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Jeff McLaughlin
Chair, Research Ethics Committee

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.